



**Oregon**  
Department  
of Agriculture

May 2014

## **The History of the Oregon Department of Agriculture**

### Introduction

"History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life and brings us tidings of antiquity."

Cicero, Roman author, orator, & politician (106 BC - 43 BC)

Someone once said that the present resembles the past until such point that it doesn't. As riddling as that reads, there is both new ground but also a deep familiarity in the rich history of the Oregon Department of Agriculture. For ODA, certainly there have been fresh, novel challenges and opportunities that never would have been foreseen as recently as a decade ago, much less nine decades in the past. So much has changed with technology, globalization of markets, and shifting demographics within agriculture and the general population. However, it is surprising to see several recurring themes over the years as illustrated in the writings of past directors and others employed by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. The need to increase efforts to keep potentially devastating livestock diseases out of Oregon, taking advantage of Oregon's reputation for high quality products through a brand identification program, coordinating efforts with industry to educate a rapidly urbanized population about the importance of agriculture— these are among points of emphasis in 2014 and beyond that were just as important in the first half of the last century.

Agriculture is and has always been one of the cornerstones of Oregon's economy and way of life. ODA has reflected that importance by establishing itself as a vital state agency that continues to serve both the industry and Oregon consumers in a dual role that marries the promotion and development of agriculture with regulatory functions. That's the way it was beginning in 1931 and that's the way it is today.

ODA is not the oldest or the youngest of state agencies. But it probably is the most diverse and has one of the richest histories of them all. Again, it is a reflection of Oregon agriculture itself.

## Pre-1931: Creation of a new state agency



*1922 Murphy, Oregon, dairy inspectors/producers meeting*

As Oregon attained statehood in 1859, farming and ranching was already thriving throughout the territory. For several decades, agriculture did not need government to assist in its production or marketing. By 1900, things were starting to change and state sponsored programs began to fill the need of ag producers– something not unique to Oregon. Several boards and commissions began taking on the role that eventually would be folded into one state agency. Among those entities: The State Brand Adjustment Board and its secretary, the state veterinarian; the Dairy and Food Commissioner, responsible for food safety protection; the State Market Agent, providing administrative oversight of both the Grain and Potato Inspection Department as well as the Weights and Measures Department; the State Horticulture Board, responsible for pest and disease prevention as well as nursery inspection; the Livestock Sanitary Board, responsible for disease prevention in animals and meat products; the Board of State Fair Directors, charged with holding an annual Oregon State Fair; the Lime Board, which ensured that farmers would be provided agricultural lime for their crops, and, the Stallion Registration Board, regulating efforts to expand the draft horse and light saddle horse industry.



In the early days of the Dairy and Food Commission, two inspectors would drive a model-T leaving Portland in late March and returning in July or August from the farms that needed to be checked, the interim bringing no contact with the home office except by mail.

Reports on the purchase of two Ford automobiles indicated the efficiency of modern transportation:

"By the use of light automobile, the inspector can cover nearly double the territory that he can with a horse and buggy. Both cars are so arranged that they can be used for sleeping purposes, which is a great advantage to the inspector when he would otherwise be obliged to drive many miles to find hotel accommodations, which usually cost him from one dollar to one dollar and a half per night."

It took the 1931 Oregon Legislature to consolidate these and other functions under one roof.

### **The Roaring 30s: Birth of ODA**



*The original Agriculture Building on 12 Street in Salem*

The law that passed the legislature, in effect, gathered up 13 separate boards, bureaus, and commissions, and tossed them all into the lap of the newly appointed director, along with a few simple rules for administration and procedure. Subsequent legislation added more responsibilities to ODA. Governor Julius Meier (of Meier & Frank fame) appointed Max Gehlhar as the agency's first director. The director's salary was \$5000. Upon that appointment, Gehlhar sent a letter to the governor: (note: these excerpts are presented as they were written)

My Dear Governor Meier:

This morning at eight o'clock the new Department of Agriculture began functioning with head-quarters in the Agricultural Building, Salem, Oregon.

Appreciation is due all retiring boards, departments, commissions, and officers for the helpful cooperation given during the process of organization. Certain economies are being brought about in the organization, which should not be considered a reflection on the conduct of those departments in the past. In most instances they are economies that were made possible by the consolidation.

...Very sincerely yours, Max Gehlhar, Director

To house this new agency in Salem, for the grand sum of \$84,000 the first Agriculture Building on 12<sup>th</sup> Street facing the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks was purchased. The department was allocated 15,000 square feet, with the State Printer taking up 21,000 square feet. The building included laboratory space for foods and dairies, weights and measures, feeds and fertilizers, hops and plant pathology. At any time upon entering the lobby one was liable to sniff the aromas of hops, printers ink, gasoline, and fertilizers drifting through the un-air conditioned premises.



*Department employees gathered at a staff meeting in the early days*

One of the first orders of business was to establish a branch office in Portland. Within two weeks, the very first State Board of Agriculture meeting brought together governor-appointed members who represented the industry. The very first board resolution,

presented by board member Robert Bond of Ukiah, addressed something not uncommon today– the protection of local markets. Note that the encroachment came not from overseas, but from a domestic competitor:

WHEREAS the live stock producer has been compelled to take a decline in the sale price of his products to the point where it is exceedingly difficult for him to continue in business, and

WHEREAS freight rates greatly add to the cost of commodities when they are brought from a considerable distance when such commodities could be bought at home,

BE IT RESOLVED that the State Board of Agriculture of the State of Oregon, in an honest effort to promote the agricultural and live stock welfare of the Pacific Northwest consider the importation of cattle from distant points, such as Colorado by Seattle and other packers, economically unjustifiable and to savor of an unfriendliness that in the end can only work a further local hardship in the face of the present sagging demand. Let us develop a spirit of comradeship and cooperation and use Pacific Northwest products and eliminate costly freight rates and disastrous market gluts.



*Technology has changed, but the need to havest the crop on time has not*

For ODA (referred to back then as SDA, for State Department of Agriculture), some of the early regulatory issues included a quarantine order in 1931 for a disease known as strawberry yellows (xanthosis) that required inspection and certification before strawberry plants from Josephine County could be moved. Although the disease concern was more localized, today the same procedure is required for nursery inspection in an effort to protect Oregon from sudden oak death.

An animal quarantine was issued for the Albany area of Linn County because of rabies diagnosed in dogs. The order restrained dogs in the area from running at large and required them to be held by chain or muzzled to keep them from biting people or other animals until such time as they were vaccinated. Treated animals were then required to wear a tag.

The department and the Board of Agriculture kept busy in 1932 with State Fair affairs while the Civil Works Administration (CWA) furnished most of the labor for fairground improvements in Salem.



ODA's grain inspections during this decade were another ongoing staple activity, although the grains themselves were not always routine. A widespread import in bulk by tanker was hemp seed from Asia. Two shiploads arrived from Manchuria alone in December of 1935. The ODA Laboratory Services regularly completed analyses of feed grains formulated with hemp seed meal as a major ingredient.

As Governor-elect Charles Martin prepared to take office in 1935, the Board of Agriculture adopted a resolution designed to keep ODA out of politics. Among its points:

"...in the case of any contemplated change in the head of the Department of Agriculture should always be one who has had actual successful experience in making his living on an Oregon farm..."

"..the Board submits for consideration of the Governor the question of whether or not the head of the Department should be appointed by and be responsible to the Board of Agriculture. Making the Board responsible would tend to keep the Department out of politics and render the work more efficient."

Such a proposal would require a change in the law. Governor Martin decided to keep the responsibility of appointing the director. Many times since, there has been consideration of making the position board-appointed, such is the case with the Departments of Environmental Quality and Fish and Wildlife. More recent boards have endorsed the status quo.

By the close of the decade, the clouds of war were gathering. ODA was not exempt from the impact.

## The 1940s: The War Years



*Women laborers filled the void during harvest while many of the men marched off to war*

As the United States entered World War II in both Europe and the Pacific Theater, the production of food and fiber became a national rallying cry. In Oregon, the effort was underscored in a 1943 letter from Governor Earl Snell to agriculturalists throughout the state:

"...the pioneers who built many of our farms and ranches out of the wilderness and the desert gave to our people in agriculture a fine heritage of courage and industry. That heritage is being demonstrated today as Oregon's agriculture responds to the call of our national government for increased production of food."

Oregon agriculture responded with vigor, as reflected in ODA's Agriculture Bulletin (forerunner to the Agriculture Quarterly) dated September, 1943:

"Platoons of school children and those folks from business life generally referred to as the white collar class have done yeoman service in helping the farmer, his wife and children and his hired men (if any) to gather in the produce of the land. But even so, in some sections of the state it has been necessary to augment available resident and itinerant help with Mexican laborers imported to this country to relieve the shortages. Probably between 3,500 and 4,000 Mexicans have been imported into Oregon for the season work and they have helped avert early crop losses."

During this time, Oregon nurserymen helped provide flowers for troop morale, and shrubs and greenery for troop camouflage. The Royal Air Force specifically called upon Oregon to provide more flax, then a prominent crop in the Willamette Valley, to help ease the shortage of parachute harnesses.

By 1943, more than 40 percent of ODA's staff had been mobilized for military service by enlistment or the draft. For four years, there was no State Fair in Salem under the department's direction. The agency continued functioning at a high level under director Ervin Peterson and a dedicated remaining staff that included a higher-than-usual percentage of women and older employees.

Letters often came to ODA from soldiers who, as civilians, were agency employees. Joe Gray, a cream grader in Southern Oregon, was a first lieutenant in the artillery. He could not state his whereabouts but said he had been fighting the Japanese and had been under fire. His clothing at the time consisted of felt boots and a parka.

Bang's Disease, more commonly known today as brucellosis, became a source of concern during the war years, partly because half of the federal inspection force had been called into military service and not replaced.

A message to the industry from the Weights and Measures program indicated that scales, like shoes and beef, were harder to get, so "it behooves all scale owners who find they need to have repairs made to their scales, to be sure they negotiate with a reliable firm."

In March 1945, Loyse Pickett of Salem became the first ODA employee to receive the ominous wire from the War Department that her husband had died three months earlier of wounds suffered in Belgium.

When the war ended, the soldiers returned. The agricultural landscape had changed a bit and the agency's responsibilities were about to expand due to issues that have remnants in today's agriculture.



*Harvesting Oregon flax in the 40s*

Director Peterson noted some of the same things about Oregon agriculture that can be said today. "Diversity is characteristic of Oregon's agriculture," he wrote. "Outside of the wheat country along the upper Columbia River, there is little or no one-crop farming in Oregon."

He also noted the growing importance of food processing in 1945:

"Modern and more attractive packaging becomes of importance both from the viewpoint of reduced costs and of consumer appeal. Oregon, being predominately an agricultural exporting state, will, it appears, be compelled to maintain the most modern and efficient methods of food processing, preservation and packaging in order to meet expected competition from other areas and possibly other countries."

Today, the Food Innovation Center, a joint facility in Portland operated by ODA and Oregon State University, is focused on fulfilling the prescience of Director Peterson.

The director also correctly noted the importance of export markets, writing:

"It has long been recognized that we must depend on distant markets for the use of most of our agricultural production. Of fruit, this is especially true. Merchandising our output demands constant attention. Consumer preference must constantly be studied."

Today, ODA's Agricultural Development and Marketing Program stresses the need for offering an Oregon product that the consumer wants. Roughly 40 percent of the state's agricultural products are exported to foreign markets.

But Peterson couldn't foresee the future of one major commodity—nursery products. He wrote, "Expansion is taking place rapidly but the gold rush may be expected to end suddenly."

In 1940, ODA licensed 1,400 nurserymen and the value of production stood at \$3.1 million. Presently, in excess of 2,000 nursery operators are licensed. The value of production in recent years has approached one billion dollars.

The effects of pesticides also weighed in on the department. ODA Chief Chemist J.D. Patterson wrote about the wonders of DDT, rapidly becoming an important chemical for Oregon agriculture:

"Very little is known about its toxicity, the residue on foodstuffs, whether it is cumulative in man when taken in small amount. In other words, this is a new product and needs much study before it can be given widespread endorsement."

In the years to follow, the industry and ODA specifically would become embroiled in the controversy of DDT.

There were some lighter moments as well in the decade of the Greatest Generation. From the Agriculture Bulletin came an incident as related by ODA Information Officer Genevieve Morgan:

"In the spring of 1945, a Harney County rancher found a cow on his range and thinking that she had been missed in previous roundups promptly roped her, sawed off one horn

and branded her. In turning her over to saw off the other horn he discovered a neighboring ranchers 'iron' on the opposite side. Visions of a long term in the penitentiary for cattle theft flashed through his mind so he promptly turned her loose and now she roams her old range with only one horn, but with two brands."

After the war, ODA and Oregon State College's Agricultural Extension Service received numerous questions from people wanting to settle and farm in Oregon. The department began to emphasize quality of farm product after war years in which quantity was stressed and certain basic fundamentals that enhanced quality were foregone.



*Medo-Land Creamery in the 1940s*

The forties also witnessed the birth of Oregon's commodity commissions as the state legislature enacted the Oregon Dairy Products Commission and the Oregon Wheat Commission. The idea of collecting funds from growers and dedicating them to education, promotion, and research eventually led to the present day 26 commissions.

Women employees of ODA were placed in non-traditional jobs within the agency for the first time including such positions as shipping point inspector. By the end of the decade, Governor Douglas McKay had appointed the first female Board of Agriculture member. Interestingly, as the times dictated, she was professionally known as Mrs. Arthur J. Larson and not by her first name.

In the 1945-47 biennium, ODA's budget stood at \$400,000 and there were 250 full time employees.

## The 50s: ODA expands its depth and scope



*Governor Holmes signed the meat inspection bill of 1957*

With the ascent of consumerism both at home and abroad, the department added to its responsibilities by creating the Division of Market Development— officially recognizing the importance of marketing Oregon's agricultural commodities.

By the time the fifties rolled around, many of the elements now managed by ODA were in place. Several soil and water conservation districts were formed, following the lead of Tillamook County the previous decade. A new brand inspection law set up district inspectors with deputies located in strategic areas. The Division of Animal Industry picked up major responsibilities in regulating livestock auction markets and administering national poultry and turkey improvement programs. More was being learned about taking care of the natural resource base that sustained agriculture. Even the potential peril of salmon was noted as dams on the Columbia River were under construction.

But the focus of the era belonged to assisting in the marketplace. In his final report written in December 1954, Director Peterson made it very clear:

"Consumers are less able to evaluate the safety, suitability, and reliability of food products. By the same token, producers are ineffective in determining or controlling the methods and processes by which the product is made available to consumers. Both groups, therefore, have come to depend in increasing degree upon the State Department

of Agriculture to protect more closely and carefully the interests of each. This tendency, we believe, will develop further thus increasing the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture."



*Measurement Standards fleet, 1956*

Ervin Peterson moved to USDA as an assistant secretary and replaced by Redmond rancher Jim Short— the fifth director of ODA. Short built upon the notion that ODA had a responsibility to provide marketplace assurance, both for producers and for consumers. It's a responsibility that remains with the agency today.

In March 1957, Director Short acknowledged that the public did not fully appreciate or understand the services it was receiving from ODA employees:

"It is my sincere recommendation to the public that it recognize the necessity and importance of state service, that it accept the state employee as a citizen of stature and responsibility, and that it insist on them being paid a reasonable wage adequate to attract and hold the most capable."

Short also pushed for more federal programs being taken on by ODA either directly or through cooperative agreement. He also requested a small emergency fund be established to finance immediate action in the event of a serious livestock or plant disease or pest.

Finally, Director Short recognized that the Oregon Department of Agriculture had to endure inadequate facilities at a time when other state agencies were fitted for new buildings:

"I want to remind the Capital Planning Commission and state leadership that agriculture, as Oregon's second most important producer of basic wealth, should eventually have its Department housed in a building in the Capital mall."

He and everyone else at the department would have to wait nearly ten years before the request was to be honored.

Baker County cattleman Robert Steward was named by Governor Holmes as new director in 1957. Steward worked to receive funding from the legislature for a statewide meat inspection program and an accelerated brucellosis eradication program. Decades later, Oregon would become brucellosis free but would lose the meat inspection responsibility back to the federal government.



*An ODA survey technician checks a trap set for fruit moths in 1956*

There was another initiative advanced by ODA, as Steward writes:

"To help the allergic and to foster a more flourishing tourist industry, the Department of Agriculture will spearhead, within the limited funds available, an expanded drive to control ragweed— the bane of hay fever sufferers."

The American Academy of Allergy gave special commendation to ODA for its ragweed control program in 1957-58 even though the effort continued for several years.

Top issues for the Board of Agriculture during this period included the Pacific Northwest freight rate structure, plant and animal disease control measures, water conservation, market and consumer research, and product utilization research.

There was also a growing concern about the ever-widening gap between urban and rural in Oregon when it comes to agriculture— an issue that remains today. Steward wrote in the December 1957 issue of the Agriculture Bulletin:

"The public must be informed as to the importance of agriculture in meeting the demands of a rapidly growing population and of the American farmer's relative economic position."

In 1958, in anticipation of the upcoming Oregon Centennial, ODA and the Oregon Historical Society announced a joint program to locate the first century farms in Oregon with a special day at the State Fair. The tradition continues. Today, there are more than a thousand century farms in Oregon compared to the original 232 that were at least eligible in 1959.

In January of 1959, Governor Mark Hatfield promoted Frank McKennon to director. McKennon previously headed up the Division of Plant Industry for ODA and had served with the department since 1935. McKennon listed as major challenges meat inspection, animal disease control, predatory animal control, market development, and consumer protection— particularly in packaged food.

"We sorely need personnel to check labels and weights of the increasingly great amount of pre-packaged foods," said McKennon at the time.

As the decade drew to a close, Governor Hatfield signed the Oregon Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act. Among its provisions:

- Gives director complete authority, with advice from board of ag, to arrange the department work in any pattern seen fit. This means the legal requirement for organization into six divisions is eliminated from the law.
- Provides a non-partisan board of agriculture
- Establishes a new direction for the department: Work toward long-range planning to develop and promote the agricultural resources of Oregon that they may contribute as greatly as possible to the future economy of the state.

Generally, ODA operates today from the foundation laid by the reorganization act.

In 1959, just as today, Oregon agriculture faced high farm wage rates relative to other states. At \$1.13 an hour, only California and Washington had higher rates.

### **The 60s: A new home for ODA**



In March of 1960, an official of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service addressed a crowd of 400 Oregon producers telling them "current pesticide control is aimed at the materials and not the user. But eventually probably some control over the user will come in the next 12 to 15 years." The official could not have known that more than 40 years later, Oregon would adopt a pesticide use reporting system. Still, it was apparent that the public was increasingly concerned about pesticide issues. Rachel Carson's 1962 book "Silent Spring" had spawned a new attitude for many Americans. ODA would evolve to its current position of regulating pesticide products but also advocating their continued, safe use as necessary tools for agriculture.



*Laboratory testing of fresh fruits and vegetables to detect pesticide residue*

ODA started looking for pesticide residues in food in 1960 with emphasis on milk and dairy products. In 1962, the lab started using gas chromatography and began testing fresh fruit and vegetables collected at wholesale and retail levels. While the levels were generally low or non-detectable, the public was afforded a new level of assurance.

Jim Short returned for a second stint as ODA director in 1960 following Frank McKennon's retirement. The Division of Marketing Development was renamed the Division of Agricultural Development to reflect other factors important to bringing farm products to market. (The current title combines the best of both worlds as the Agricultural Development and Marketing Program).

Short, the department, and the industry were taking a closer look at global trade. They didn't necessarily like what they saw. U.S. foreign policy allowed relatively easy access for other countries to the U.S. marketplace but permitted foreign countries to impose stringent trade restrictions on U.S. products. The result was large imports of fescue seed, wool, and lamb among other commodities. Trade restrictions hindered tree fruit exports from Oregon.

Short returned with a 1960s list of recommendations for Oregon agriculture:

- Stimulate expansion of food processing capacity, including potato, green pea, and sugar for eastern Oregon, canning and freezing for western Oregon.
- Maintain strong research and extension services to develop new and improved high value crops which can be transported feasibly to distant markets.
- Assert leadership in expanding foreign markets and protecting Oregon crops against excessive imports.
- Protect farm lands from excessive taxation resulting from encroachment of residential and industrial developments.
- Develop surface and ground water and maintain a priority for irrigation. Expand soil conservation, watershed protection, and flood control.

Short also recognized the growing importance of ag-friendly legislators who could provide the resources needed for ODA to achieve its goals.

"It is vital for the future of Oregon agriculture that capable, informed friends of agriculture be sought out and encouraged to serve in the legislature. Agricultural interests should give these candidates their full support," said Short in 1961.

Short was laying the groundwork for an idea he broached in the mid-50s— a new home for ODA. In 1962, the director noted that "...efforts to obtain adequate functional housing had been frustrated and delayed. The ever-expanding building needs of other state agencies have taken priority in the allocation of state funds within the limits of wisely balanced budgets."

New programs had doubled ODA's staff. Several Oregon cities had turned over such activities as milk inspection to ODA, which strained the bacteriology lab facilities to the maximum. The old 12th Street Building was now so crowded that the agency's efficiency was suffering.

The Board of Agriculture passed a resolution that called for working with ag groups and others to see authorization of a new building for ODA in the 1963 legislative session. The effort was successful although delays kept the building from opening at its current site until 1966. That included a state government financial crisis created by a voter approved tax referendum in 1964 that led to a moratorium on new building construction. ODA was directed to cut back several programs and shift the source of funding more to users rather than the general public. It was the first major downsizing of the department since World War II.

The cycle would resurface in 1991 when Ballot Measure 5, the property tax limitation measure, was approved by Oregon voters.

Nonetheless, the new Agriculture Building on the corner of Capitol and Union in Salem was dedicated in 1966– a welcome facility to the staff with more convenience and access to the public.

Farmer and former legislator Walter Leth was named director in 1967. Under his watch came an increased emphasis on protecting the public. In 1969, Governor Tom McCall appointed the Committee on Synthetic Chemicals in the Environment, which served in an advisory capacity to ODA and its administration of the state's pesticide law.



The late 60s also saw a return of export marketing as a priority for ODA. Director Leth accompanied the governor with industry officials in trade missions to Europe and Asia to investigate new market opportunities. Today, it is routine for the governor and the ODA director to lead trade delegations into foreign markets, as so much of Oregon agriculture ends up as an export.

On August 15, 1969, Genevieve Morgan retired as director of information after 30 years of service to ODA. (This author is indebted for Ms. Morgan's detailed and delightful accounts of the department's activities and accomplishments in its first four decades. Without her writings, this story, in its present form, would not be possible.)

### **The 70s: Struggling farmers and new technologies**

The 1969 Legislature set the tone for agriculture in the 70s by charging ODA with enforcement of the Pesticide Act. One of the first orders of business was implementing new regulations that restricted the use of DDT. Director Leth noted the importance of keeping pesticides available as a tool for agriculture, despite the growing safety concerns:

"One of the facts most overlooked by many of those talking and writing about environmental problems is that farmers themselves are fundamentally environmentalists. They must use the natural resources at hand to make their livings. Hence they are as concerned about safeguarding those elements as anybody possibly could be. It is fundamental that we continue to do even more research in hope that we can find the best possible controls– biological ones where possible– to effect the best possible environment for all forms of life and still provide the cheapest, the most wholesome and safest food supply for America."



*ODA's success with biological control included the extraction of beneficial insects to be placed in infested areas of tansy ragwort.*

It was the Oregon Department of Agriculture's efforts to control tansy ragwort— a poisonous plant responsible for numerous cattle deaths in western Oregon— that made ODA a leader in biological control. At one time, Oregon was suffering cattle losses of up to \$10 million a year because of the noxious weed. A governor's task force was established to develop a plan of attack. Eventually, ODA established a biocontrol program that utilized two natural predators of tansy— the cinnabar moth and the flea beetle. The one-two punch dramatically reduced the number of plants and, to this day, has saved the cattle industry millions of dollars.



In 1970, the Board of Agriculture focused on three areas of study— taxes on farmland, the effect on agriculture in general from secondary boycotts and picketing of agricultural products, and the upgrading of housing and field facilities for seasonal farm laborers. Taxes and labor would continue to be key themes in the decade. The other major issue was land use. Again, Director Leth articulated a viewpoint that could easily be heard today from agricultural leaders:

"Unplanned urban sprawl, increased demands for more and larger highways and their accompanying shopping centers and the growth of service and other industries on previously productive farmland seriously threatens Oregon's food and fiber production potential."

The seeds of his concerns and others led to Oregon adopting the nation's first statewide comprehensive land use laws when Governor McCall signed Senate Bill 100. Legislator and dairy farmer Hector McPherson led the charge at the State Capitol as the state took steps to protect farm and forest land from development. With Measure 37 approved by voters in 2004, land use issues involving agriculture have come back to the forefront.

After several years of effort and progress, Oregon received brucellosis-free status in 1971. That same year, Governor McCall named rancher and legislator Irvin Mann as the new ODA director. Mann was a proponent of a water bank for Oregon— using state bonds to create a fund to loan potential irrigators and developers. Coming from the Hermiston area of Eastern Oregon, Mann was aware of the pending need for water as a lifeline for agriculture.

Other emerging issues in the decade included field burning by Willamette Valley grass seed growers. The 1973 Legislature passed a bill to tax growers with funds earmarked for developing alternatives to field burning. The smoke created by the practice was becoming less tolerable to the public.

Oregon also joined Massachusetts in 1974 as the only states establishing regulations that define organic foods. The intent was to ensure honesty in labeling.



Extreme drought conditions in 1973 combined with fears that a decrease in gasoline and diesel fuel allowances to dealers would hamper harvesting in Oregon. In many cases, those fears were realized as Americans were faced with an energy crisis brought on by the Arab oil embargo.

A major strike by longshoremen on the West Coast in 1971-72 shut down grain exports and forced ODA to lay off 43 inspectors. Meanwhile, the state meat inspection program that started in 1955 was phased out and taken over by federal inspectors.

With today's dependence on the computer, it is unimaginable how ODA could function back in earlier times. But the birth of the computer age took place in the seventies albeit with some reservations as noted in the 1970 ODA Biennial Report:

"The department began using the computer in 1957. A cautious, deliberate approach has been used in utilizing this expensive management tool. With a few exceptions, only accounting is computerized. Other uses are under study."

By the next decade, computers were emerging as a tool of choice for many ODA staff.



*Farmers on tractors rallied at the State Capitol as part of a national strike for parity*

In 1975, Governor Bob Straub appointed Leonard Kunzman as director, a post he would hold for a dozen years. Kunzman faced another year of drought in Oregon but also reinforced the notion that marketing is a key for agriculture. The emphasis would carry over into a new decade. But Kunzman also presided during a time of a nationwide farm crisis in which scores of farms went out of business under financial dire straits. More than 100 tractors paraded through Salem in December 1977 as part of a national strike by farmers for parity.

By the close of the decade, the U.S. farm economy had improved a bit but major challenges remained for Oregon's producers and processors.

### **The 80s: Smoke, insects, and branded Oregon products**

Many of the issues facing agriculture today emerged three decades ago. Rising energy costs became more pronounced as producers and processors strived to better the bottom line. Dryland wheat growers in Northeast Oregon made fewer trips over their fields to cut down on diesel fuel consumption, even experimenting with no-till farming. Applications of herbicides were made at key times to cut down on chemical costs. Irrigators started making better use of water through conservation methods. In essence, economics forced efficiency.

For ODA, successful programs maintained continuity. The battle against tansy ragwort was being won in the eighties. ODA was in the business of breeding these beneficial insects, using large, gasoline powered vacuum devices to suck up colonies of flea beetles taken from tansy ragwort plants and transplanting them to heavy ragwort infestations.



*Helicopters in the early morning as gypsy moth eradication comes to Lane County*

A new invasive species that had caused all sorts of trouble on the East Coast hitchhiked its way to Oregon in the mid-80s. The gypsy moth infestation of Lane County led to the largest gypsy moth eradication project ever undertaken in the West. Nearly a quarter-million acres, including urban and residential areas, were sprayed utilizing helicopters in and around Eugene after some 19,000 gypsy moths were trapped. Initial plans were to use chemical insecticides. But ODA ultimately decided on *Bacillus thuringiensis* or Bt, a biological insecticide that targets the gypsy moth. The zero tolerance policy for gypsy moth continues today. But thanks to an aggressive detection program and quick eradication efforts before infestations turn large, Oregon has been able to keep the plant-eating insect at bay.

Director Kunzman presided over a variety of changes and challenges. In the winter of 1981, he predicted the emergence of some key concerns:

"Soil erosion will continue to be a problem; however, there is a new awareness among those in agriculture of the importance of maintaining and protecting our soil resource. Adequate water for all users— agriculture, municipal, or other users— will be the big resource issue of the 80s."

To address some of the natural resource concerns, the 1981 Oregon Legislature directed the addition of a new ODA division— the Soil and Water Division. Eventually, it would become the present day Natural Resources Programs.

But it was in the area of marketing that Kunzman really hit the mark:

"We will see more Oregon crops produced for a proven, specific market. The traditional pattern of growing first and marketing later has its shortcomings. There will be a continued emphasis on product quality, and new customers will appear in the world market place as emerging nations begin to develop buying power and recognize a commitment to improving the diets of their populations."



*ODA's marketing efforts took advantage of Oregon's high quality, unique products*

In the years to follow, right up to the present, Oregon has primarily looked to the growing economies in Asia as a place to focus its export efforts. By the end of the decade of the 1980s, ODA had established an Export Service Center— a certified lab that could fast track U.S. food products to Japan first, and in later years, additional Asian markets. It was a first-of-its-kind program that could assure overseas customers that the food it tested met that country's requirements and specifications.

ODA's Agricultural Development and Marketing Division recruited Oregon companies to set up product booths at large trade shows. In many cases, ODA staff represented those companies in their stead. At the time, frozen fruits and vegetables from Oregon were quite popular, replacing the old canned-style products of previous decades.

An early overture to the vast potential of the Chinese market came in the spring of 1985 when a high level agricultural trade delegation from the Fujian Province of China toured Oregon operations. Director Kunzman and Governor Vic Atiyeh welcomed the delegation, which had special interest in Oregon grass seed for forage and hay production. Currently, Oregon supplies 15 million pounds of grass seed to China, now mainly for conservation purposes and beautification. While the burgeoning trade relationship stalled with the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989, it was really the 1980s when the grass seed industry established a beachhead in the Chinese market. With help from ODA and Oregon State University, the export of grass seed to China has been a terrific success.

Director Kunzman also believed that ODA should coordinate with agricultural groups in trying to solve common problems. Weekly meetings of ag leaders included talks from farm group lobbyists, legislative perspectives, and various committee reports. It was a great way to share information and influence policy makers at the State Capitol.

"The department walks a fine line in its leadership role," wrote Kunzman in 1985. "We avoid inappropriate partisan positions or campaigns. Rather, we look to organizing agriculture statewide so as consensus in the best common interest of Oregon agriculture is reached."



But in 1988, a calamitous event forced the legislature to curtail the use of an important tool for a segment of Oregon agriculture. Smoke from a nearby grass field fire drifted onto I-5 near Albany resulting in a massive pileup that took the lives of seven people. The public relations fallout from the accident ultimately ended in a phasedown of field burning in the valley, as administered by ODA. By the time the full legislation took hold in 1998, growers were allowed to burn no more than 65,000 acres— a far cry from the quarter million acres allowed previously. Director Bob Buchanan— appointed in 1987 by newly-elected Governor Neil Goldschmidt— had presided over the transfer of the field burning program from the Department of Environmental Quality to ODA.

In the spring of 1989, the Alar-in-apples scare triggered a lack of confidence in the nation's food supply as consumers across the country worried about long-term health effects of pesticide residues. ODA tested produce from around the state for residues of Alar and aldicarb and found all produce either contained no detectable chemical residues or were within acceptable levels set by EPA. Of more concern was discovery of listeria, a food borne bacteria, in cooked seafood. A successful educational program aimed at seafood processors eliminated the problem and resulted in a special citation to ODA from the Food and Drug Administration.

By the close of the decade, the value of Oregon's agricultural production exceeded a record setting \$2.6 billion as the industry shook off at least some of its earlier challenges. ODA's biennial budget, reflecting the increase in responsibilities, approached \$40 million.

## The 90s: Approaching the new millennium

By adopting a three-pronged mission statement, ODA put itself in a better position to truly assist the agriculture industry and Oregon consumers in general. That mission statement directed the agency to: (1) Promote and develop markets for Oregon agricultural products, (2) Protect Oregon's natural resource base for present and future generations of farmers and ranchers, and (3) Ensure food safety and consumer protection in the marketplace. The mission remains the same today.

Before the new decade, Bruce Andrews was named director, replacing Bob Buchanan, who moved on to direct the Oregon Economic Development Department. Over the next several years, ODA and OEDD would work together to identify new export opportunities for Oregon agriculture, and build capacity for production and processing within the state. Rural economic development became a high priority. Later in the decade, Governor John Kitzhaber would appoint a Food Processing Council in Oregon tasked with finding ways to increase the amount of what Oregon processes and markets.

Andrews also stressed the theme echoed in earlier administrations– that maintaining Oregon's reputation for high quality products was critical:

"It's hard to get that reputation but it's easy to lose it," he said in 1992. "So we have to be very vigilant in our abilities to maintain quality."



In 1993, a new responsibility shifted from the Oregon Health Division to ODA– the shellfish program. ODA was now responsible for monitoring the safety of shellfish for consumers, both the commercial industry and the recreational harvesters. But a couple years earlier, ODA learned about a marine toxin known as domoic acid when it showed up in Dungeness crab in the winter of 1991. Since that time, periodic harvest closures have been ordered by ODA after routine shellfish samples are lab tested and found to have elevated levels of marine toxins. *(right, Food Safety Inspector John Paeth gathers shellfish samples for testing)*

Also in the summer of 1991, Oregon's first Asian gypsy moth was trapped by ODA in north Portland. This pest represented a much greater threat than its North American cousin in that the female can fly– not the case with the traditional gypsy moth Oregon normally deals with. In the spring of 1992, a large aerial eradication project was underway as residential neighborhoods were treated. A relatively small group of activists took ODA to court in trying to stop the 10,000-acre project. The agency prevailed and

has since established an excellent safety record as well as historical proof that the spray projects for gypsy moth are effective. Now, the general public tends to understand the threat represented by the exotic pest and largely supports ODA's efforts.

Drought hit most of Oregon in 1992 as ODA facilitated federal disaster declarations in nearly all 36 Oregon counties. Several crops dependent on irrigation suffered during the drought as reservoirs in some cases stood at historically low levels.

During his tenure as director, Andrews advocated applied research to help agriculture solve some of its problems. Much of that research was done at Oregon State University. As was the case with his predecessors, Andrews valued the relationship between what was once known as OSC– now OSU– at the department. The ODA director and the Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences, Dr. Thayne Dutson, would take time out of their schedule traveling across the state in tandem, meeting with agricultural groups and individual farmers, and listen to their concerns. The outreach gave both ODA and OSU a better idea of what challenges needed to be tackled.

In the middle part of the decade, ODA became more involved in environmental regulation. Water quality problems and the decline of salmon runs placed pressure on forestry and agriculture to respond. As a whole, the ag industry realized it was going to face regulation from state government, but it told lawmakers that they would prefer the Department of Agriculture to do the regulating. While it was perceived as a compliment and endorsement of ODA's relationship with industry, the request eventually tested that relationship in some parts of the state. Senate Bill 1010 was approved and established agricultural water quality management plans and rules for the state's water basins. ODA's approach was to make these plans locally-developed through advisory boards. Andrews and his successor Phil Ward often told farmers that it was not the intent of ODA to sit in the tractor seat, but merely point out water quality problems and ask landowners themselves to fix them. While at times controversial in its infancy, SB 1010 has proven to be a sensible, flexible way for agriculture to address water quality issues.



The 1995 session of the Oregon Legislature resulted in a new responsibility for ODA's Measurement Standards Division. In addition to assuring motor fuel quantity for

consumers, inspectors were now given the added responsibility of checking for motor fuel quality. Every year since, samples have been screened and tested for such qualities as octane and water content. Generally, the violation rate has been extremely low, proving that Oregon motorists are getting good gasoline.

During the nineties, ODA was enjoying success in several export venues. But Asia remained the primary focus.

"By no means have we saturated the Japanese market," Andrews said at the time. "We have barely scratched the surface of the Chinese market. We can go down the list of several countries around the world. The point is that the upside potential for marketing our agriculture is very real."

Despite occasional attempts to stop funding part or all of ODA's marketing program, the legislature provided the dollars, especially when industry representatives would testify as to the value and effectiveness of the department's program.



In early 1996, heavy rains combined with a melting snowpack in the mountains to swell most rivers and streams in Oregon. Tillamook County, in particular, experienced significant flooding which impacted an important dairy industry. Resting on the banks of Mill Creek in Salem, the two-story Agriculture Building— now 30 years old— was about to meet its demise. As the creek spilled over its banks, a torrent of water rushed into the building's basement, which housed the Measurement Standards Division and the Animal Health and Identification Division. ODA's supplies, storage, meeting rooms, and much of its building infrastructure were also located in the basement. More than 10 feet of water poured into the building that fateful night, forcing employees and programs to evacuate. The water damage was too great, the building was shut down.

Most of the staff and programs, with the notable exception of the laboratories, found a temporary home on Cherry Avenue near Keizer. Away from the Capitol Mall for a couple of years, the quarters were crowded, but the staff hardly missed a beat. In the fall of 1998, a brand new version of the Agriculture Building was officially opened. A third story was added, a second tenant (the Land Conservation and Development Department) joined ODA, and the department was back in its old familiar territory.

By 1999, Bruce Andrews left ODA to take a job with the Port of Portland. Assistant director Phil Ward was named by Governor Kitzhaber to head the agency into the next century.

A new millennium was approaching and all of state government was preparing for potential problems of Y2K and its effect on business operations. By now, so much of what ODA did relied on technology— either for communications or for processing of some sort. Fortunately, the year 2000 came without incident. All the planning and preparations at least demonstrated that ODA was not going to get caught off guard again as it did with the 1996 flood.

## **2000 and beyond**

It didn't take long in the new millennium for the Oregon Department of Agriculture to experience challenges and successes. The 1999 Oregon Legislature passed a bill that created a pesticide use reporting system (PURS). Some of the details of the program were embroiled in controversy and often set up adversarial relations between farmers and environmentalists. In the end, it took six years for the program to receive the necessary funding to complete development of an electronic-based reporting system. By 2007, pesticide users required to report will be able to do so. Imagine the wonder of farmers back when ODA was first formed had they known the pesticides they used would be reported not on paper or by voice, but by a magical technology known by the mysterious name— the internet. After a couple of years in operation, a lack of funding put PURS in mothballs.

Under Director Ward's leadership, trade ties with China were strengthened as Oregon grass seed is now in demand. The Chinese counted on grass seed and perhaps Oregon nursery products to help beautify the country in time for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Ward saw a chance for other Oregon agricultural products to get through the door pried open by grass seed:

"I continue to see China as an opportunity for Oregon as an agricultural market," Ward said in 2001. "The potential— and we have to underline the word potential— for a wide variety of Oregon agricultural products to successfully enter that marketplace is very real. China is moving very deliberately toward a market driven economy. As that occurs, we're going to see the demand for more of the kinds of consumer food products that we see here in the United States."

On the environmental front, Oregon continued to see an increasing number of new threats from invasive species— many of them potentially harmful to agricultural crops. With globalization of trade and travel, these unwanted, non-native pests required more than any one agency could handle. The 2001 Legislature approved the formation of the Invasive Species Council to help coordinate efforts to exclude as many of the undesirables as possible. ODA's Dan Hilburn, administrator of the Plant Division, was the council's first chair.

Water concerns in the Klamath Basin drew national attention when local farmers and ranchers rallied against a decision to withhold irrigation water in favor of fish. While ODA had no direct involvement in the matter, the department continued its advocacy for a solution that satisfied the needs of agriculture.



*ODA's first female director, Katy Coba, visits a Japanese market with Governor Kulongoski*

In 2003, new Governor Ted Kulongoski appointed Katy Coba as the first female director of ODA. Coba— who grew up on a Pendleton wheat ranch— was no stranger to the department, having served as a special assistant to Director Andrews a decade earlier.

The discovery of the fungus *Phytophthora Ramorum*— the organism that causes sudden oak death— in imported nursery stock in Oregon has resulted in a large-scale inspection and certification program for nurseries administered by ODA. The confirmation of the nation's first case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE or Mad Cow Disease as it is commonly known) in neighboring Washington State involved ODA's Food Safety and Animal Health divisions. Ground beef product from the infected animal had made its way to Oregon while there was the potential of cattle related to that original animal residing in Oregon. ODA staff spent long hours responding to public concerns while partnering with USDA to complete investigations.

Then in 2004, voters approved Ballot Measure 37, which calls for compensation or a waiver of land use restrictions for property owners who want to develop their land. As an advocate of the state's land use policies, ODA has continued to fear for the protection of farmland— first from encroaching development and now perhaps from the ballot box.

In 2005, the value of Oregon agricultural production eclipsed the \$4 billion mark for the first time. By 2011, the high water mark topped \$5 billion. Although expenses remain high for producers, the notion that Oregon agriculture is not growing remains a myth.



*Fresh Oregon blueberries are now finding their way into Korea.*

In recent years, ODA has experienced both unique challenges and opportunities. In 2012, Oregon became the first state allowed to ship fresh blueberries into South Korea— a major development and boost to Oregon's important blueberry industry. ODA worked hard for many years to help gain that approval from the Korean government. A major challenge struck in 2013 when genetically modified wheat— something that had not been approved by USDA for commercial use or purposes— was discovered in Northeast Oregon. That discovery threatened soft white wheat exports to critical Asian markets and fueled debate about GMOs. ODA worked with the wheat industry and USDA to reopen the Asian markets while the investigation continued on how the GM wheat got there in the first place. No conclusive answers have been found but the incident appeared to be an isolated case. Nonetheless, genetically modified or engineered crops is expected to be a major policy discussion in the future, not only in Oregon but the entire US.

All in all, Director Coba feels good about the future:

"Oregon agriculture remains a very positive force in the state's economy. I believe the message is being heard, particularly by our friends in the more urban parts of Oregon. We have good opportunities in terms of adding value to what we produce— whether that is processing, marketing, packaging, labeling, or taking advantage of technological advances. I'm very optimistic about the future of Oregon agriculture."

What will the rest of the decade bring? What about the next 50 years? It's anybody's guess. But a look back in history suggests some of the issues facing the industry and the Oregon Department of Agriculture will still be around many years later.